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ABSTRACT

Pay equity is the most important issue affecting all women (but especially women of color) seeking economic equity in the workplace. Over the last two decades, the earnings of White women as a percentage of the earnings of White men have remained constant at about 60%. The wages of women of color, on the other hand, increased dramatically (as a percentage of White men's earnings) during the period of 1955-75, only to settle at about 55% in the last decade. Despite this increase, women of color, who account for the highest percentage of female-headed, single parent households, also account for the highest percentage of families living in poverty. By 1977, a woman heading a family was 5.7 times more likely to be poor than a man, and a Black woman was 10.5 times more likely (and a Hispanic woman 11 times more likely) to be poor than a White man. One major reason for women's low earnings is their concentration in a relatively few job categories (mainly clerical and service work) with low wages. Increasingly women of color are moving into the same occupations as White women. Increasing numbers of Black women, for example, are shifting from blue-collar, operative work to white collar work and almost one-third of women workers in nearly every racial and ethnic group are now employed in clerical occupations. (The remainder of this fact sheet, which includes five statistical tables, briefly outlines the goals of the National Institute for Women of Color and the National Committee on Pay Equity.) (KH)

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WOMEN OF COLOR AND PAY EQUITY

INTRODUCTION

WHILE PAY EQUITY is the single most important issue affecting all women seeking economic equity in the work place, the issue is even more significant to women of color who continue to suffer the brunt of economic discrimination in today's society.

Women of color, as well as White women, are concentrated in a relatively small number of occupations with low wages. Pay equity means the elimination of discrimination in wages for undervalued jobs held predominantly by women and people of color. It requires that wages be based on the worth of a job—not the gender or the race of the people who tend to hold the job.

Over the past twenty years, the wage gap between White women and women of color has narrowed significantly. But the wage gap between women and men has remained essentially the same.

FACT Women of color earn less than either White men, men of color or White women. To an even greater extent than women overall, women of color hold the lowest paying jobs.

FACT More than half of Black and Hispanic female-headed households live in poverty.

FACT Women of color are concentrated in a small number of occupational categories, as are White women. 59½% of Black women work in only two of twelve major occupations—clerical and service work—compared to 53.3% of White women who work in those two occupations.

FACT Increasingly, women of color are moving into the same occupations as those in which White women work, so that:[1]

- Clerical work now accounts for almost one-third of women workers in nearly every racial and ethnic group;
- Only Cuban, Chinese and Native American women have slightly higher percentages in operative, blue-collar work than in clerical;
- The jobs held by Black women have shifted significantly from blue-collar, operative work to white-collar work: clerical, professional, technical, managerial and sales.
- Mexican American and Puerto Rican women remain concentrated in operative occupations, although this occupational category is second for both of these populations to clerical work.

Over the last two decades, women of all races and ethnic groups have become more alike in the jobs they perform and the wages they earn, although important differences remain with women of color earning less than any other group.

[1]U.S. Bureau of the Census

WAGES

ON THE AVERAGE, women who work full time, year-round are paid approximately 61¢ for every dollar paid to men.[2] For women of color, the gap is greater. As graph I indicates, for every man's dollar in 1981, Hispanic women earned 52¢, Black women 56¢, and White women 61¢.[3]

The 1981 median incomes of full-time workers in all occupations tell the story further:

White Men	$21,178	White Women	$12,665
Black Men	14,984	Black Women	11,438
Hispanic Men	14,981	Hispanic Women	11,917

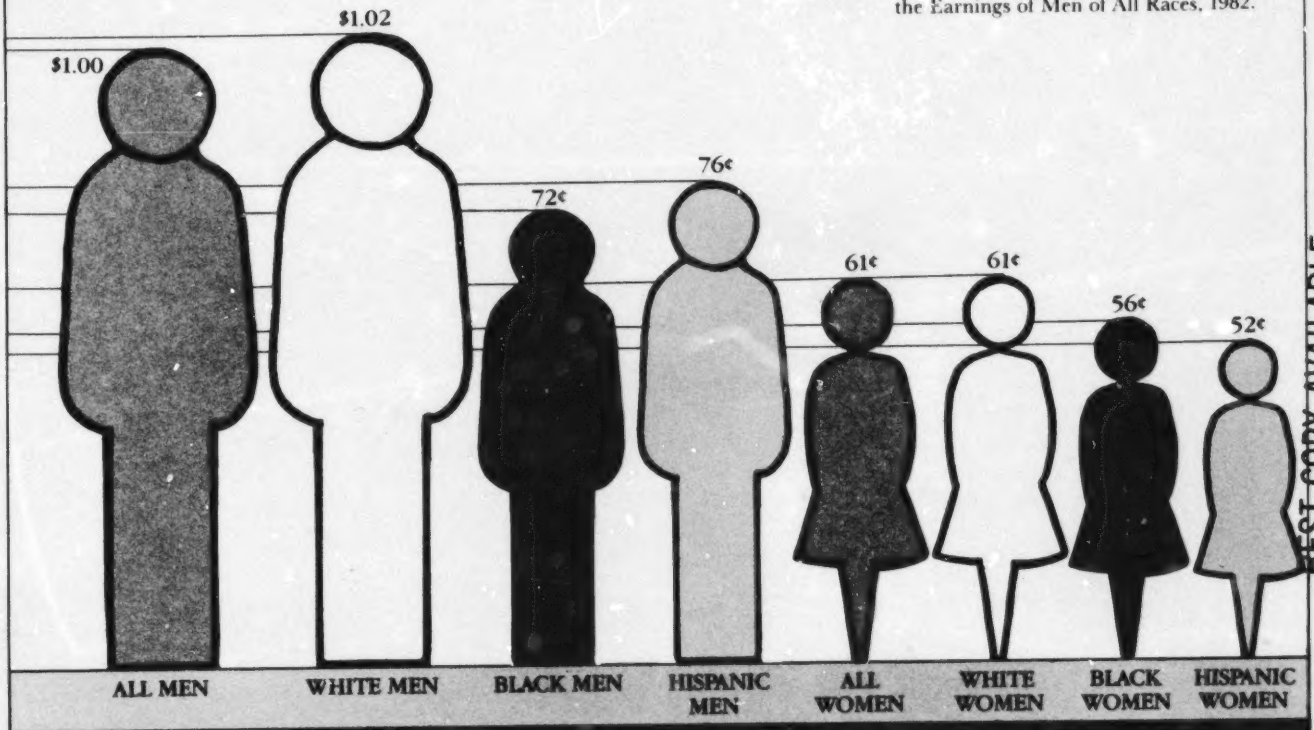
Over the last two decades, the earnings of White women as a percentage of the earnings of White men have remained constant—at about 60%. The wages of women of color, on the other hand, increased dramatically (as a percentage of White men's earnings) during the period 1955-1975 (as shown in Table I on page 3) only to settle in at about 55% over the last decade.

[2]Annual statistics for year-round, full-time workers, rather than weekly or hourly statistics, are used when available because (1) traditional wage gap figures have been calculated on these basis, and (2) weekly and hourly data can introduce distortions due to multiple job holding and overtime, part-time, and seasonal employment.

[3]Breakdowns for Asian/Pacific and Native American women are not available and are not included for that reason.

GRAPH 1:

Mean Earnings of Year-Round, Full-Time Workers by Sex and Race as a Percentage of the Earnings of Men of All Races, 1982.



SOURCE: Current Population Reports, U.S. Census Bureau.

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TABLE 1:

Median Income of Year-Round, Full-Time Workers by Sex and Race, 1955-1981

YEAR	MEDIAN INCOME OF WHITE MEN	*Percentage of Income of White Men*					
		WOMEN OF ALL RACES	WHITE WOMEN	BLACK WOMEN	BLACK & OTHER WOMEN	BLACK MEN	BLACK & OTHER MEN
1982	$22,232	61.5	62.3	55.7	56.6	71.0	75.2
1981	21,178	58.8	59.8	54.0	54.8	70.6	74.5
1980	19,720	58.8	59.3	55.3	55.6	70.4	74.7
1975-1979	15,451	58.3	58.7	54.9	55.6	72.8	75.4
1970-1974	10,893	56.7	57.1	49.3	50.4	68.3	70.7
1965-1969	7,697	56.3	57.8	N/A	42.8	N/A	65.8
1960-1964	6,017	57.7	59.5	N/A	38.8	N/A	63.9
1955-1959	4,874	61.1	63.2	N/A	36.4	N/A	60.6

SOURCE: Current Population Reports, Series P-60, #140 U.S. Census Bureau

FEMALE-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS AND POVERTY RATES FOR FAMILIES

WOMEN OF COLOR account for the highest percentage of female-headed, single parent households and, likewise, the highest percentage of families that live in poverty (income of less than $9,862 for a family of four).

Increasingly, women and their children account for the

Percent of households maintained by a married couple (1982):
84.5% of White households
55.1% of Black households
73.0% of Hispanic households

Percent of households headed by a single female (1982):
12.4% of White households
40.6% of Black households
22.7% of Hispanic households

Percent of two-parent families that live in poverty (1981):
6.3% of White households
15.6% of Black households
15.4% of Hispanic households

Percent of female-headed families that live in poverty (1981):
27.4% of White households
52.9% of Black households
53.2% of Hispanic households

SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of the Census

nation's poor—more than a third of single mothers with children under six who worked full time at paid labor at some point in 1977 were poor—and this situation is compounded many times over for women of color. By 1977, a woman heading a family was 5.7 times more likely to be poor than a man, and a Black woman was 10 ½ times more likely—and a Hispanic woman 11 times more likely—to be poor than a White man. There is even a wide variation among groups of Hispanics; for instance, a Puerto Rican woman was 15 times more likely to be poor than a White man.

OCCUPATIONAL SEGREGATION

ALTHOUGH THERE are still differences in the types of jobs held by different groups of women (see Table 2), the single most important source of women's low earnings is their concentration in a relatively few job categories with low wages.

In 1979, for example, over 35% of all women were employed as clerical workers: 29% of Black women, 31.1% of Mexican women, 38.4% of Puerto Rican women, 31.2% of Cuban women, and 35.9% of White women (see Table 2). The average wage for typists (who are 96.6% female), for example, in 1982 was $11,804 compared to $15,342 for carpet installers (98.8% male) and $21,840 for mail carriers (83% male).

Affirmative action and equal pay for equal work laws have helped women of color and White women find new jobs and higher pay. But the majority of all women continue to work in overwhelmingly female jobs where wages are illegally depressed.

TABLE 2:

Occupational Distribution of Employed Women 16 Years Old and Over by Race and Type of Spanish Origin, 1979.

	WHITE WOMEN	BLACK WOMEN	MEXICAN WOMEN	PUERTO RICAN WOMEN	CUBAN WOMEN
WHITE COLLAR	66.5	49.7	46.1	56.6	46.7
Professional Managerial	23.2	17.6	9.9	14.6	8.9
Sales	7.4	3.1	5.1	3.6	6.6
Clerical	35.9	29.0	31.1	38.4	31.2
BLUE COLLAR	14.2	18.1	28.1	26.4	41.9
Crafts	1.9	1.2	1.8	2.2	3.9
Operatives	11.0	15.3	25.0	23.4	36.8
Laborer	1.3	1.6	1.3	0.8	1.2
FARM WORKER	1.3	0.8	2.4	0.9	0.0
SERVICE	18.1	31.5	23.4	16.1	11.4

SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of the Census. 1981. Persons of Spanish Origin in the United States: March 1979. *Current Population Reports*, Series P-20, No. 354, pp. 29. Washington, D.C.: USGPO.

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. 1980. *Employment and Earnings*, Vol. 27, No. 1.

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UNEMPLOYMENT RATES

WOMEN OF COLOR, in addition to the economic hardship of the lack of pay equity, have also suffered severely high unemployment rates over the last three years.

	1980	1981	1982
White Men	6.1%	6.5%	8.8%
Black Men	14.5%	15.7%	20.1%
Hispanic Men	9.7%	10.2%	13.6%
White Women	6.5%	6.9%	8.3%
Black Women	14.0%	15.6%	17.6%
Hispanic Women	10.7%	10.8%	14.1%

SOURCE: Bureau of Labor Statistics, division of employment and unemployment analysis.

SUMMARY

WOMEN OF COLOR continue to encounter occupational segregation and wage discrimination. They comprise a large share of those who hold low paying clerical, service and blue collar jobs.

A high proportion of families of color are headed up by single women—and thus the need for an equitable wage is critical—yet, ironically, these are the women most likely to be unemployed and underpaid.

The twin barriers of gender discrimination and racial and ethnic discrimination are devastating. In the last twenty years, the number of persons in poor families headed by women of color has increased by more than 50%. By any measure, the social cost of this poverty to future generations is enormous.

Certainly the goal of economic equality for women of color cannot be realized until concerted efforts are made to eradicate the job and wage discrimination based on both race and sex that undermines economic potential in the American labor force.

PAY EQUITY: ELIMINATING THE GAP

THE WAGE GAP between women and men is one of the oldest and most persistent symptoms of sexual inequality in the United States. Pay equity, or comparable worth, attacks the problem of sex-based wage discrimination by mandating that jobs characterized by similar levels of skill, effort, responsibility and working conditions be compensated at similar wage levels regardless of the sex or race of the worker holding the job. The goal of pay equity is to raise wages for undervalued jobs held predominantly by women and minorities.

Pay equity is becoming an accepted principle and practice in both the public and private sectors. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 forbids wage discrimination among jobs which are the same, as well as those which are different but comparable. Through collective bargaining, organizing and litigation, women are making headway in the effort to close the wage gap. The AFL-CIO, women's and civil rights groups, and a growing number of states and localities have adopted pay equity as official policy. Equally important, individual working women and their families have come to recognize comparable pay as a personal right.

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NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR WOMEN OF COLOR

THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE for Women of Color (NIWC), founded in 1981, is a non-profit organization created to promote economic and educational equity for women of color (Black, Hispanic, Asian-Pacific, American Indian, and Alaskan Native).

With the broad purpose of "fostering communication and cooperation among women of color," NIWC strives to: build leadership skills; educate the public about basic needs and issues; creates sensitivity to racial and ethnic similarities and differences; and establish and strengthen a communications network.

In its short history, NIWC has initiated several priorities that include:

- regular publication of Brown papers to educate the public on critical issues relevant to women of color.
- solidification of a network for women of color through an annual National Strategies Conference held in October.
- promotion of educational and employment programs geared toward women of color.
- publication of fact sheets on pertinent issues and statistics, such as "Economic Facts" and "Population Facts" on women of color.

For more information on NIWC activities, contact: Sharon Parker, NIWC, 1712 N St. NW, Washington, DC 20036; 202/466-2377. Contributions to NIWC are welcomed and tax deductible.

NATIONAL COMMITTEE ON PAY EQUITY

PAY EQUITY ADVOCATES have formed the National Committee on Pay Equity—the only national coalition working exclusively to achieve equal pay for work of comparable value. The Committee has over 150 organizational and individual members, including international labor unions and major women's and civil rights groups as well as educational and legal associations.

The goals of the National Committee include:

- providing leadership, coordination and strategy directions to members and other comparable worth advocates.
- providing assistance and information to the growing number of public officials, labor unions, women's groups and other organizations and individuals pursuing pay equity.
- stimulating new comparable worth activities.
- bringing national and local attention to this issue.

For membership and other information, contact: Joy Ann Grune, the National Committee on Pay Equity, 1201 16th Street, N.W., Suite 422, Washington, DC 20036; 202/822-7304.

This paper was prepared by Marguerite Gee and Denise Mitchell.

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